

(Received via e-mail)

From: mickey microtus
To: <smcconnell@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 3/15/2009 11:00 AM
Subject: Rubicon trail Draft Order comment

Dear Sue McConnell,

I am writing to you in regards to the Central Valley Water Board (CVWB) and its recent draft order for the Rubicon trail in Eldorado County.

My first trip to the Rubicon trail was in 1999. Since that initial trip I have joined the 4wd Cliffhangers of Vacaville (4wd Cliffhangers) in 2002, Friends of the Rubicon (FOTR) in 2003 and Rubicon Trail Patrol (RTP) in 2005 and have been an active member in each group. Since joining these groups I have noticed a marked change in conduct by members of the 4wd community in regards to preservation of natural resources. This would include trail sanitation, litter, staying on established trails, and most importantly the willingness to voice their concerns about our resource with other trail users. That willingness to speak out has done an incredible job on educating other trail users to maintain our trails.

Since my initial visit to the Rubicon trail I have made as many as a dozen trips to the trail each year. What started out as a family outings with my kids in car seats, has turned into a passion for the trail and a passion to help preserve it for others to enjoy. My first project with FOTR was leading a group of 61 volunteers with the help of Eldorado County D.O.T. to conduct erosion control work in the Gatekeeper area of the trail near Loon lake. Since that time I have seen work projects done by as few as one to almost one hundred. It is clear to me that members of FOTR and Eldorado County have a dedication to the Rubicon trail and the willingness to continue to work toward maintaining it.

Since joining FOTR I have attended at least three organized work parties each summer. In addition to those work parties I have made and will continue to make a number of trips each year on my own help maintain the trail. My last venture was just before Winter when I spent two days working on a water bar to maintain a natural water course and keep it off of the trail. During those two days I had lot of interaction with trail users that were curious as to what I was trying to accomplish. The best part was there were a lot of those users that knew exactly what I was doing and after talking with them, it was apparent that they were very knowledgeable in the issues regarding trail and its proper use. Those that were unaware of the issues left with a better understanding of their role in the long term use of the trail.

In order to help me better understand how water flow effects the trail and how to manage it, I have made a point of visiting the trail in April or early May to photograph areas of the trail. This is usually a solo trip that is done mainly by foot from Gatekeeper to the Little Sluice. This time of the year is often referred to as the Spring melt, though there is still a substantial amount of snow on the ground. This is not a heavy use time for the Rubicon trail and the vehicles that I have seen during those trips have been heavily modified and tend to leave a very small footprint. In the three years that I have conducted this trip I have yet to see what could be considered resource damage.

I have also spent a considerable amount of time acting as a member of the RTP. There are members of both the RTP and FOTR that spend time at the Kiosk. I will be spending a number of days this year at the Kiosk (first being April 11th). First contact with trail users as they pass by the Kiosk is extremely important though I really enjoy making contact with users who

area already on the trail. Once on the trail, people tend to slow down and relax and are very open to discussion regarding trail use. Meeting someone on the trail after having already met somebody at the Kiosk only helps to reinforce the importance of proper trail use. Please keep in mind that though the Kiosk may be vacant on a particular day (between the county and FOTR/RTP volunteers it is usually staffed) there are others out on the trail doing their part.

A few indicators to show just how informed and responsible the 4wd community has become regarding trail use is litter, spill kits and sanitation. It is rare that I am able to collect more than a few items of trash while walking the trail. I would guess that most of it has fallen out of a vehicle as opposed to being left intentionally. This being no different than an item falling off of a persons pack. In addition I have seen a huge increase in the number of vehicles that are carrying either a spill kit for vehicle fluids, wag bags/personal sanitation kits or both. How many hikers, or people that snowshoe or cross country ski carry wag bags? On all of our 4WD Cliffhanger runs our club brings a portable latrine purchased by the club (\$250) and a number of spill kits. The latrine gets plenty of use and I am happy to say that since 2002 our club has only needed a spill kit for one minor mishap.

I attend one or more Winter trips to the Rubicon each year. Depending on snow conditions, snow depth and the number of vehicles we may only drive as far as the turnoff to Wentworth springs campground or make it as far as Ellis creek, though it is not uncommon to see other vehicles venture past Ellis during Winter trips. Overnight camping in the snow is a special treat that more should enjoy. With proper vehicles, equipment and camping gear it is a safe activity that my now 11 year old son and I have enjoyed for years. Over the snow travel has little if any impact to underlying substrate as vehicles drive on top of as opposed to in the snow. In addition I find that conflict between motorized and non-motorized user groups during Winter conditions to be a mute point as I have yet to see a cross country skier or person on snow shoes while on the trail. In addition, I have yet to witness any user conflicts between motorized and non-motorized user groups while on the trail throughout the year. It is rare to see a hiker on the Rubicon trail.

I have a degree in Wildlife Management from Humboldt State University. I have spent a considerable amount of time on the Eldorado National Forest and also the Tahoe National Forest to the North where I worked as a biologist in 1990. Though not scientific in any manner, I would venture to say that the use of the Rubicon trail has little impact on the local wildlife. If anything, the Rubicon trail and others are used as a corridor for travel by wildlife within the forest. For example, I walked the Rubicon trail from Ellis cr. to Little Sluice on May 2nd of last year to photograph water movement in relation to the trail. While the camping area at Ellis creek had at least 90% snow cover, other areas were void of snow. The Little Sluice had near 100% snow cover with snow 3-4 feet in depth. I observed a set of Mt Lion tracks that started near Ellis cr. and followed the trail almost all the way to Little Sluice. Clearly the trail was being used as a corridor by the Mt. Lion. The best part of the trip was finding a set of tracks right in the middle of the Little Sluice that were made by what I believe, due to the small size, to be a Pine Martin. Bears are also common along the trail as well as many different species of raptors and songbirds.

Please allow Eldorado County, Eldorado National Forest and volunteer groups such as Friends Of The Rubicon to continue making progress in regards to management of the Rubicon trail without imposing additional restraints and regulations on the Rubicon trail user groups. Most if not all, of the points brought up in the California Valley Water Boards recent draft order either have been addressed or are already earmarked with funding to be completed by late Summer of 2010. This clearly shows a past and ongoing effort by the

above agencies and groups to effectively manage the Rubicon trail. Friends Of The Rubicon is the largest volunteer group in the United States dedication to a single 4wd trail. With the cooperative help of Eldorado County and the USFS they are setting an example to the Nation that continued dedication to the management of a trail such as the Rubicon can be successful.

Thank you,

Robert Lightfoot